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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4615
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 RANGOON 000447

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BURMA: CEASEFIRE GROUPS COUNTER JUNTA BORDER GUARD
FORCE PROPOSAL

REF: CHIANG MAI 71

Classified By: Political Officer Sean K. O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) &
(d)

Summary

11. (C) Many key ethnic ceasefire groups from Kachin and Shan States have rejected GOB proposals to transform their armed wings into an integrated armed force led by the Burma Army (BA). In late June, four ceasefire groups signed a Memorandum of Understanding among themselves as they separately rejected the junta's proposal that they participate in a Border Guard Force (BGF) or state militia. Three groups -- the Kachin Independence Organization, Shan State Army-North, and National Democratic Army-Kachin -- privately issued statements to the GOB explaining their rejection of the offer. The statements, some more explicit than others, expanded on demands raised during the National Convention and all appear to be pushing off major decisions about political and armed status until after a new government is formed following the 2010 parliamentary elections. Karen ceasefire groups -- the Democratic Karen Buddhist Army and the Karen National Union - Peace Council -- have essentially accepted the border guard proposal and demanded minor requests in return. End Summary.

Border Guard Force a No-Go Until After Election

12. (C) Embassy contacts report that key ethnic ceasefire groups have recently rejected regime proposals to transform their autonomous armed elements into integrated units led by the Burma Army prior to the 2010 elections. According to press reports, Military Security Affairs (MSA) Chief Lieutenant General Ye Myint starting in April traveled to ethnic-minority regions to pressure 17 ceasefire groups to disarm or transform their armed units into a border security force before the 2010 elections. According to a document provided by Kachin peace negotiator Saboi Jum's son, Zau Ma, the Northern Commander outlined the function and administrative structure of the ceasefire groups post-election, including business interests and military-related activities. (See septel.) Exile press

reports indicate the United Wa State Army (UWSA) and armed Kokang groups have already rejected the proposal, while other groups are in the process of considering it.(reftel.) Saboi Jum and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) Secretariat members Sai Soe Aung and Sai Shwe Kyu told us ceasefire groups from Kachin and Shan State met in late June to discuss their reactions to the junta's requests to disarm or transform their armed wings.

13. (C) The so-called Joint Action Committee (JAC), an apparently new ethnic alliance, possibly formed in reaction to the BGF proposal and comprised of the Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), Shan State Army-North (SSA-N), the New Mon State Party, and the Shan State Special Region 4, signed a June 20 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). According to Sai Soe Aung, the June 20 MOU reiterated the JAC's support for the regime's self-described "Roadmap to Democracy," outlined the group's political demands and concerns, and stated that the groups would not "transform" their armed wings' structure until after the new government is formed following the 2010 parliamentary elections. (Note: The MOU was not made public and we do not have a copy of the agreement. End note.) Saboi Jum noted that the MOU is not clear what the groups would do if the regime does not address their concerns.

14. (C) The JAC also reportedly concluded that ceasefire groups were receiving different guidance from the regime on the so-called transformation. The KIO was asked by the Northern Command to transition its armed wing, the Kachin

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Independence Army (KIA), into a Border Guard Force (BGF) while the SSA-N was asked to transform its army into a state militia. However, according to the regime's proposals, both the BGF and state militias would incorporate Burma Army officers into their ranks and fall under the direct command of the respective Burma Army regional commander, something JAC members view as unacceptable.

For KIO, Political Concerns are Top Priority

15. (C) The KIO issued its own statement to the Northern Command after the JAC meeting. In a July 8 meeting with Poloff, Saboi Jum shared a letter reportedly passed to the Commander of the Northern Command on June 20, plus associated internal KIO talking points outlining the KIO's pre- and post-election demands. Key concerns are control over civil administration in Kachin State, the need for autonomy over education, and rights to natural resources and tax revenues.

16. (C) The KIO statement urged the junta to focus on addressing these political and economic concerns before it presses the KIA to transform into a BGF. According to the statement, the KIO/KIA will only consider the junta's request to transition its armed elements after key concerns are addressed and a new government is formed. According to the internal KIO talking points, if the regime adequately addresses the KIO/KIA's concerns, the ceasefire group's leadership would consider converting the KIA into an autonomous "State Security Force" rather than an integrated BGF (Note: We cannot confirm whether the KIO has conveyed this point to the regime. End note.) According to KIO documents, the new force would be under the control of current KIA commanders, not the BA, and it would maintain its KIA structure and chain of command. The talking points also stress the KIO/KIA would reject the junta's calls to integrate as many as 36 BA officers and other military personnel into any transformed KIA, citing "cultural differences."

KIO Asks for the Political Moon

17. (C) The KIO's talking points expand on its political

demands, which observers agree the regime is unlikely to meet. The talking points restate the importance of the 19-point proposal -- a six-page document containing the groups' complaint that the principles adopted in the new constitution overlooked ethnic minority rights and the emergence of a genuine federal union -- first delivered to the regime in July 2007. The points also call for one-third direct representation by KIO members in the Kachin State government, one-third of the Kachin State Cabinet ministers to be drawn from the KIO, and the right to propose two judges for the state court.

18. (C) Saboi Jum told us that the KIO went on a "listening tour" to see how their constituents felt about the junta's proposal. It appears the document and talking points were a culmination of those efforts. (Note: We do not know if other ceasefire groups conducted similar surveys or whether those groups' leaders have a firm grasp of how their members and constituents feel about the issue. End Note.) Saboi Jum added the KIO does not have a timetable for achieving these political goals other than "after the new government is formed." When asked what the KIO would do if the regime does not address political concerns, Saboi Jum acknowledged the KIO has no clear alternative plan.

NDA-K OK with Transformation - on Their Terms

19. (C) The National Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) on June 24 issued its own statement to the Northern Command that echoed several of the KIO points, but with less improbable demands.

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In the statement, shared with us by a contact, the NDA-K stressed the importance of its military status, claiming it could contribute more to the government and national security as an army than as a political group. The document added that the NDA-K would accept the integration of 20-30 BA officers, but only if these officers were to fall under ultimate NDA-K command. (Note: The document focused mainly on the future military status of the NDA-K and its support for the transformation but did not address political concerns. End note.)

Softer Stance by Karen Groups

10. (C) The Karen National Union Peace Council (KNU-PC) and Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA)-- Karen ceasefire groups that broke away from the armed insurgent group, the Karen National Union, in 2007 and 1994, respectively -- have agreed to the Border Guard Force proposal in principle. According to Karen community leaders and peace negotiators, Saw Simon Tha and Rebecca Htin, the KNU-PC has agreed to gradually transform into a Border Guard Force if the junta addresses certain contentious points. Ye Myint requested the KNU-PC accept one major and 30 Burma Army sergeants into its ranks and retire any KNU-PC soldiers over 50 years old as part of the transition. KNU-PC leader, 80 year-old Htay Maung, is currently drawing up a counterproposal that will contest the mandatory retirement age, request a defined role for himself, demand a meeting with Than Shwe, and retain some symbolic ownership of the new force by keeping existing insignia and adding the Karen name to their force's title.

11. (C) According to Simon Tha, the KNU-PC would accept inclusion of Burma Army commissioned and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) in the new Karen BGF, but would insist that any BA officials embedded in the new force be ethnic Karens. Additionally, the KNU-PC would accept the BA training some of its current officers and NCOs. Simon Tha told us the KNU-PC has not yet presented these points to the junta, choosing instead to wait for Ye Myint's next visit, which will presumably be scheduled once the security situation in Karen state stabilizes. The KNU-PC is unsure if the junta will accept its demands or what it will do should the demands be

rejected, but Simon Tha and Rebecca Htin commented that the organization has no desire to resume fighting. They accept that there will be one army in Burma, but are hoping for the best possible outcome.

¶12. (C) According to Simon Tha, the DKBA has accepted the Border Guard Force proposal outright. (Comment: The DKBA currently operates alongside the BA and receives significant strategic direction from it. The proposal to incorporate the DKBA into an integrated element of the Burmese armed forces would not significantly change the DKBA's current status or operations; we therefore expect they will agree to the transformation. End comment.)

Same Same, But Not So Different for the SSA-N

¶13. (C) According to SNLD Secretariat Members Soe Aung and Shwe Kyu, the SSA-N in April had an informal meeting to discuss its future status (Note: The two did not attend the meeting, but said they were briefed on it afterwards. End note.) A subsequent June 23 letter from SSA-N Chairman Sao Lwe Maw to Ye Myint provided to us by an Embassy contact states that, after internal discussion, the SSA-N decided not to alter the terms of its 1989 ceasefire agreement with the regime (presumably including a military transformation) until after a new government is formed. The statement reminded Ye Myint that the 1989 agreement called for a ceasefire, cooperation on regional development, and a postponement of any discussions about changes in the structure of the SSA-N until the "new democratic government" is formed. (Note: In 1989 most expected this would happen after the 1990 elections

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rather than over 20 years later. End note.)

¶14. (C) Despite the rejection of the regime's proposal, however, the statement took on a decidedly conciliatory tone, ending with a "frank and humble request" that the regime be patient as the SSA-N works through its options. As with the other groups, Soe Aung and Shwe Kyu suggest that the SSA-N does not appear to have any concrete plans for what would happen if its concerns remain unmet.

Comment

¶15. (C) The ceasefire groups' statements offer a revealing look at the substance of the otherwise secret original ceasefire agreements. Many years later, it is obvious that the regime has yet to make good on its promises. In that context, nearly all major ceasefire groups appear to be putting off major decisions about their armed status until after the 2010 election. The regime, though, may have inadvertently driven several ceasefire groups together, fostering cooperation that could complicate GOB plans in the future.

¶16. (C) Members of the JAC are anxious for the regime to respond to their oft-raised political and economic concerns; but they appear unwilling to be confrontational, not wanting to jeopardize the peace process that appears their best hope for progress. The groups are pursuing a risky course: asking the regime to address their concerns, but seeming prepared to wait until a new government is formed before attempting to force the issue. By then, though, it may be too late, as they might retain little leverage with which to achieve their goals.
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